



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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Memorandum

To: Solicitor
Inspector General
Assistant Secretaries
Heads of Bureaus and Offices

From: P. Lynn Scarlett *P L Scarlett*
Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget

Subject: Safe Mail Handling

The recent events involving confirmed cases of disease from mail contaminated with anthrax bacteria, as well as the potential for other threats to be transmitted by mail, demonstrate how important it is to use safe mail handling procedures.

The attached guidelines for safe mail handling are consistent with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. Postal Service. They remind us of the importance of detection of suspicious envelopes and parcels, prevention of exposure to potential hazards, and, in the event of an exposure to a biological agent, early treatment.

Please be sure that each of our employees promptly receives a copy of these guidelines and the names and contact numbers for the appropriate emergency or security personnel at their respective locations.

Attachment

cc: Bureau Mail Managers

Safe Mail Handling

At work or at home, we all handle and open mail. It is important that we do so carefully and safely. By taking some simple precautions we can minimize exposure to potential hazards. First, be on the lookout for suspicious envelopes and parcels. If you encounter one, don't panic! Take appropriate steps to reduce exposure of yourself and others. Notify the appropriate authorities. Understand the facts about biological agents such as anthrax. If you may have been exposed, remember that early detection and treatment are essential.

What constitutes a suspicious envelope or parcel?

Some typical characteristics that U. S. Postal Inspectors have detected over the years, which should trigger suspicion, include envelopes and parcels that:

- are unexpected or from someone unfamiliar to you;
- are addressed to someone no longer with your organization or are otherwise outdated;
- have no return address, or have one that can't be verified as legitimate;
- are of unusual weight, given their size, or are lopsided or oddly shaped;
- have excessive amounts of postage or wrapping materials such as tape or string;
- are marked with restrictive endorsements, such as "Personal" or "Confidential;"
- have protruding wires or aluminum foil, strange odors or stains;
- show a city or state in the postmark that doesn't match the return address.

Know the facts about Anthrax....DO NOT PANIC!

Because there have been several incidents around the country in which anthrax threats have been received, it is important to understand a few facts.

- Anthrax organisms can cause infection in the skin, gastrointestinal system, or the lungs. To do so, the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or

inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist.

- Disease can be prevented after exposure to the anthrax spores by early treatment with the appropriate antibiotics.
- Anthrax is not spread from one person to another person.
- For anthrax to be effective as a covert agent, it must be aerosolized into very small particles. This is difficult to do, and requires a great deal of technical skill and special equipment. If these small particles are inhaled, life-threatening lung infection can occur, but prompt recognition and treatment are effective.

How to handle a suspicious envelope or parcel?

- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.
- PLACE the envelope or package in a plastic bag or some other type of container to prevent leakage of contents.
- If you do not have any container, then COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
- LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
- WASH your hands with **soap and water** to prevent spreading any powder to your face.
- Facilities that initially inspect large quantities of mail such as mail rooms may want to use latex or vinyl gloves to reduce the potential for skin contact.

What to do next?

- REPORT THE INCIDENT to building security official, available supervisor, or local law enforcement officials.
- LIST all people who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials for follow-up investigations and advice.

What to do if a powder (or other material such as a liquid, gas or aerosol) spills out of an envelope or parcel?

- DO NOT try to clean up the powder. cover the spilled contents immediately with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover!
- Then leave the room and close the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
- REPORT THE INCIDENT to a building security official, available supervisor or local law enforcement officials.
- If release is airborne (i.e., gas, aerosol) shut off air handling system to room.
- WASH your hands with **soap and water** to prevent spreading any powder to your face.
- REMOVE heavily contaminated clothing as soon as possible and place in a plastic bag, or some other container that can be sealed. This clothing bag should be given to the emergency responders for proper handling.
- SHOWER with **soap and water** as soon as possible. *Do Not Use Bleach Or Other Disinfectant On Your Skin.*
- If possible, LIST all people who were in the room or area, especially those who had actual contact with the powder. Give this list to both the local public health authorities so that proper instructions can be given for medical follow-up, and to law enforcement officials for further investigation.

Other Useful Sources of Information:

Centers for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/>

U. S. Postal Service, <http://www.usps.com/>

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